

Raising Mary

It is 2:00 Sunday afternoon. Mary, a 10th grader in the Gear Up Kentucky program, is trying to shoo away her brothers and sisters and clear the kitchen table so she can work on her homework. Finally, all is quiet. She sits down at her laptop (**on loan from her school**) and logs on to her portal at www.ken.ky.gov (**via statewide broadband wireless network**). She types in her ID and Password upon a prompt and up pops her portal (**where all her learning records are kept**). Next to a personal greeting from KEN (**Kentucky Education Network**), Mary sees the updates from her school counselor on Mary's progress on math (**which was identified as her weak area by Gear Up assessment test**), news on environmental issues that she elects to receive for her research paper, grades for this past semester from her school, online class news from Jefferson Community College where she dually enrolled in English (**which was identified as her strong area by ACT**) and an online AP history course from **Kentucky Virtual High School**, couple of emails from her friends, and a progress chart for her learning goals (**Individual Learning Plan, ILP**) – graduating from high school and getting a degree in environmental studies as quickly as she can so she can help her single mother support her brothers and sisters. She clicks on her math supplementary course listed in her portal and starts working on her assignment. Mary looks at the kitchen clock. The online tutoring (**Online Tutoring Service**) is on duty. She clicks on the tutoring button and up pops a friendly helper in a separate window. Mary asks the tutor if she can assist her with the assignment. The tutor, having the same screen display as Mary's, reviews Mary's work, and takes Mary through the process with her problem watching Mary's typing displayed right on her screen. Thus done, the tutor informs Mary that with this problem solved, the rest of her assignment should be a shoo-in for Mary.

Fast forward to year after next. Mary is doing well based on her ILP with caring support from her teachers, counselors and online instructors. In a late Sunday evening, Mary logs on to her portal to see if her transcripts have been automatically sent from her high school to Kentucky State University (**Seamless Data System**), if she has been admitted to KSU, and if her financial aid has been processed and approved (**GoHigher Portal**). The good news jumps out right at her next to the greeting! She is now a college student! She can now proceed to register for the courses. She clicks on the registration button on her portal and it immediately shows her the status of the courses she wants to take. One is full and the other one is still available. She fills out the registration form from her portal for the available course. When she clicks on the course that is full, her advisor comes online (**Online Advising Service**) and searches the course catalog with Mary for an equivalent course from KCTCS (**Course Applicability System**). When found, Mary registers for the replacement course using the same form. Upon completion of registering for these 2 courses, Mary is prompted for textbooks to be ordered, library resources and services needed, online tutoring services, and online writing help. Mary does not have time to explore these options other than ordering and paying for the textbooks online from her portal.

In yet another late Sunday evening after the summer school starts, Mary logs on to her portal to do her course work. Buttons for her 2 classes are on the top page, listing the assignments she needs to do. She clicks on the 1st button and it takes her to a

Blackboard course offered by KCTCS without going through another ID/Password (**Single Sign-on**). When she clicks on the assignment, up pops the help including instructor's lecture notes and library resources pertinent to the assignment. Still having problems, Mary clicks on reference help (**Online Reference Service**) and out pops the friendly librarian. Having the same screen display as Mary, the librarian takes Mary to available full text databases, library catalogs, videos in KET's **Encyclomedia**, and the Web resources to search on her topic. Learning how to search along the way, Mary thanks the librarian and gathers all information to finish her 1st assignment. Mary then clicks on the 2nd button and it takes her to a Blackboard course offered by KSU without going through another ID/Password (**Single Sign-on**). The lecture notes and library resources are useful. But Mary needs someone to help her with the essay. She clicks on online writing help (**Online Writing Tutoring Service**) and out pops an online tutor. Mary shows the tutor her draft. The tutor helps her re-structure her essay and makes suggestions on the wording. Mary finally finishes her work. She is tired but glad that she has done the best she can with such limited study time she has.

Juggling 2 part-time jobs and taking full loads for 4 years, Mary can now see the end of the tunnel near. She is on track to graduate with a B.S in environmental science and a teaching certificate for high school. She is the first one in her family to have a college degree. Looking back, Mary is grateful for the convenient and easy-to-use one-stop portal that follows her throughout her learning path and all the just-in-time support services she receives via the portal. Without that, Mary knows that she won't be where she is today. She also knows that her sisters and brothers look up to her and think it is possible to be whatever they want to be.

Fast forward to the first day when Mary, the science teacher, arrives in KYSmallTown High School before the school starts. There are only 5 girls and 6 boys in her class. The lab equipment is old and dilapidated. The science program is on the verge of being phased out. Mary sees a challenge. She logs on to her portal (**Lifelong Learning portal**), clicks on Resources for Teachers, out pops the learning objects (**Digital Learning Objects Repository**) that she can grab to build her online component for the class. She selects games that make learning fun, remote instrumentation (**Internet2**) that makes up the lack of equipment at school, virtual field trips that the class can take sitting in the classroom, videoconferencing that connects her students with experts in Germany, students in India and China as they discuss how global warming comes about and what they can do to help, and, at last but not least, a set of assessment tools (**Online Assessment**) to use for measuring her students' performance as the class progresses. Using **Internet2** connection, Mary works virtually with her fellow scientists in Australia involved in the **Southern Skies Project** on observing the movement of a star and plans to incorporate the team's findings into her curriculum. Mary feels hopeful that she can engage and nurture her students in learning by using the world as the classroom even as they live deep down here in a rural community in Kentucky. After all, she can't think of a better way to give back to the community that has given her so much. Mary rubs her blurry eyes, slings her laptop over her shoulder and walks into the night fragrant with fresh mountain air.